

A double helping of church then wrestling with a goose – a prime minister’s Christmas

Theresa May opens up to the Radio Times about her festive plans for this year

Presents after church, goose instead of turkey and a rerun of David Suchet as Agatha Christie’s Poirot: Theresa May has revealed her routine for Christmas Day has changed little since childhood. The prime minister gives an insight into her festive plans in an interview with the Radio Times this week, saying she regularly attends church on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and goes to bed with Radio Berkshire. **What will you be doing on Christmas Day, prime minister?** What I’ve been doing for the last nearly 20 years. A quick drink with friends in our village and then the churches in my Maidenhead constituency come together to put on a lunch and entertainment for older people who would otherwise be on their own. I have a drink and chat with them then go home and serve up my own meal.

Does somebody cook Christmas dinner for you? No! I always like to cook the Christmas meal myself. But it won’t be turkey. For a few years now we have tended to have goose instead.

There’s a huge amount of fat on a goose ... There is, but if you keep the fat, it makes wonderful roast potatoes for quite a long time thereafter.

Your father was a vicar. Is the religious side of Christmas important to you? Yes. Throughout my life I have been going to midnight mass on Christmas Eve and church on Christmas Day morning. As a child I had to wait until my father had finished his services before I could open my presents.

That must have been hard for a little girl? It felt like a very long wait. Others I knew would be able to open their presents first thing in the morning.

If you could pick the TV schedule for Christmas night, what would it be? I always like to see Doctor Who on Christmas night, if possible, and a nice Agatha Christie to curl up with. David Suchet was a great Poirot – he got him to a T.

When you were young, did your parents let you watch much? We could only get the BBC. Then, one day, my mother managed to jiggle the aerial and we got ITV and I saw Robin Hood. That music and Richard Greene as Robin Hood really grabbed me.

Any female TV role models? I enjoyed watching The Avengers with Diana Rigg and then Joanna Lumley [in the New Avengers]. But I don’t think I thought about it in those terms. I have never had a female role model – I’ve always just got on with doing what I am doing.

Do you and Philip snatch sofa suppers at Number 10? I don’t tend to eat in front of the TV. When we’re going to bed at home, I quite like listening to BBC Radio Berkshire.



Top: Theresa May and husband Philip at church. Above: actors Diana Rigg, Richard Greene and David Suchet. Left: Ed Balls Main photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/LNP

Did you watch Ed Balls on Strictly Come Dancing? I like watching Strictly but my Saturday evenings tend to be busy so I wasn’t really able to see Ed. Just snatches on the Sunday results programme. **Tempted, prime minister?** I can’t dance. It’s not a good idea. **Do your advisers ever say: “Prime minister, you really should watch this”?** My advisers don’t tell me what to watch on TV – I watch what I want to watch. **When you sat down to Christmas dinner last year, did you have any idea you would be doing it as prime minister this year?** Politics is an interesting business, things happen. In this case, obviously, they happened rather more quickly than people had expected. But no, I had no idea.

First edition of Newton text could fetch \$1m

Jasper Jackson

A first edition of Sir Isaac Newton’s revolutionary text Principia Mathematica could become the most expensive print of the breakthrough work ever sold as it goes under the hammer with a record guide price of at least \$1m (£786,000).

The extremely rare “continental” copy being sold by the auction house Christie’s was one of a handful of texts destined for Europe and has minor differences from those distributed in England by Newton and the book’s editor Edmond Halley, the astronomer best known for the comet named after him.

The list price of \$1m to \$1.5m is thought to be a record for the book. An English version bound in the same red morocco leather, which was said to have been presented to King James II, was sold for more than \$2.5m in 2013, more than four times its list price of \$600,000.

Only about 400 copies of Principia’s first edition were printed, of which the continental versions accounted for 20%.

Sir Isaac Newton, who put forward his groundbreaking theories on subjects such as gravity and motion in Principia Mathematica



Halley encouraged Newton to organise his theories into a text and paid for the printing because the Royal Society, of which he and Newton were members, had no funds.

The society retains two copies including its “greatest treasure” – the original manuscript from which the first print run in 1687 was based.

Written in Latin, the book’s full title is Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica or Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy. It lays out Newton’s groundbreaking theories in areas such as gravity and the forces of motion and introduces a more rigorous mathematical method to physical science.

Keith Moore, the head of the Royal Society’s library, described the book as a “benchmark in human thought”, adding: “It’s not just the history and development of science; it’s one of the greatest books ever published. It was hugely influential in terms of applying mathematics to basic physical problems.”

Analysis What’s behind PM’s Christian message?

Harriet Sherwood

Theresa May’s Christmas interview in the Radio Times marks the third time in just over a week that the prime minister has spoken publicly about her Christian faith. Speaking to the Sunday Times a week earlier, May said: “I suppose there is something in terms of faith, I am a practising member of the Church of England and so forth, that lies behind what I do.”

The other occasion was at last week’s prime minister’s questions. Responding to Conservative MP Fiona Bruce, who asked about the freedom of Christians to speak openly about their faith, May said the issue “matters to both her and me”. She told MPs: “Our Christian heritage is something we can all be proud of.”

Before becoming prime minister in July, May was a regular member of the congregation at St Andrew’s church in Sonning, part of her Maidenhead constituency. She had been “a valued and very supportive member of our church family for the last 20 years”, said the local vicar, Jamie Taylor, after her leadership victory.

Two years earlier, May had spoken on Desert Island Discs about her faith. She said: “I think it’s right that we don’t flaunt these things here in British politics. But it is a part of me, it’s there and it obviously helps to frame my thinking and my approach.”

Linda Woodhead, professor of the sociology of religion at Lancaster University, said May “is a genuinely devout Anglican, and has real convictions about the common good, duty, service – those traditional Anglo-Catholic virtues. Why does she feel the political imperative to tell us this? It’s tied up with the Tories’ core constituency and with Brexit. Brexiters were disproportionately likely to be Church of England, so May is appealing to an important block of voters.

“It’s reassuring to say she stands for those values. But in the long term, it’s a dangerous strategy. The country is increasingly non-religious, so it could alienate people.”

May’s predecessor, David Cameron, described his faith as a “bit like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns: it sort of comes and goes”. Gordon Brown spoke of his “moral compass”. Tony Blair avoided talking about his Christian faith while in office.

Margaret Thatcher was the “most religious prime minister since William Gladstone”, according to Eliza Filby, a lecturer in modern British history at King’s College London. “Margaret Thatcher set out a biblical justification for neoliberal economics. There’s no way May would do that,” said Filby.

May’s recent references to her faith and Christian upbringing were not overly significant, said Filby. “There are two times a year when politicians talk about faith – Christmas and Easter. No one would listen at any other time.”

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